

Child Fatality and Near Fatality Response

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

Policy: 100.0165

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The Department requires an immediate and thorough response to the fatality or near fatality resulting from abuse or neglect of a child who is under the care and supervision of the Department. An administrative meeting will be scheduled by the Director or designee to review the incident and gather all available information.

When the circumstances require further investigation, a response team, which includes DCYF staff and community partners, will be appointed to examine the circumstances surrounding the fatality or near fatality. This review will enable the Department and the community to identify important issues related to child protection and take appropriate action to improve efforts to prevent child fatalities and near fatalities in the future. The Department is not alone in its responsibility to protect children; therefore, reviews and subsequent recommendations should address issues of interagency collaboration, communication and decision-making. The Department may also review the fatality or near fatality resulting from abuse or neglect of a child who was previously under the care and supervision of the Department.

RIGL 42-72-8 provides for the disclosure of information relating to a child fatality or near fatality in accordance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended, P.L. 104-235 (42 USC 5106a), which requires the Department to develop guidelines which allow for public disclosure of the findings or information about the case of child abuse or neglect that has resulted in a child fatality or near fatality. A near fatality, as defined under CAPTA (42 U.S.C. 5101 et seq.), is an act that as certified by a physician places the child in serious or critical condition.

Support services for Department employees will be coordinated through the Department's Critical Incident Stress Management Team, and the RI Employee Assistance Program is also available on a self-referral basis.

Related Procedure

[Child Fatality and Near Fatality Response](#)

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Procedure from Policy 100.0165: Child Fatality and Near Fatality Response

- A. Immediate Departmental Response
 - 1. In all child fatalities and near fatalities, resulting from abuse and/or neglect, involving children under the care and supervision of the Department, the Director or designee must be notified immediately of the incident. The Child Protective Services (CPS) Assistant Director or designee will make the notification if the incident is reported to the Call Floor during standard working hours. The on-call CPS administrator will make the notification if the incident is reported during nights, holidays or weekends.
 - 2. The Director or designee will notify the Child Advocate immediately upon receipt of the information of all fatalities and near fatalities of children under the care and supervision of the Department.
 - 3. The Director or designee will notify the Deputy Director, administrative legal counsel, Regional Director or administrator of the respective division, and the Chief of Staff. The Regional Director or administrator will notify the worker, supervisor and unit administrator.
 - 4. Worker, supervisor and administrator with case responsibility will review the case record and prepare a chronology of Departmental involvement for the administrative review.
 - 5. An administrative review will be scheduled by the Director or designee and will include all administrative and direct care DCYF and community partner staff who have involvement with the family, the Chief of Staff and administrative legal counsel. If a foster family is involved, the licensing administrator will also attend. The child's case record and legal case record will be available for review at this meeting.
 - 6. The purpose of this meeting is to review the incident and gather all available information.
 - 7. The Deputy Director or designee will coordinate the assignment of staff responsibilities relating to gathering additional information, interacting with other agencies and preparing a report and/or press statement.
 - 8. If it is determined that a more in depth review is required, a Child Fatality Response Team will be convened.
- B. Child Fatality Response Team
 - 1. When the circumstances require further investigation, a response team, which includes DCYF staff and community partners, will be convened and coordinated by the Deputy Director or designee.
 - 2. When applicable, members of the team will be selected in accordance with DCYF Policy 200.0040, Complaints/Charges Against Employees Represented by Local 580.
 - 3. The purpose of this review is to examine the circumstances surrounding the child fatality or near fatality and to evaluate the implications for future practice.
 - 4. The team will assess the quality of services provided by the Department and community partners, evaluating compliance with applicable regulations and policies.
 - 5. The review may require staff interviews for the purpose of obtaining first hand information of critical case events. Employees may have representation present during this process.
 - 6. A coordinated and cooperative effort with other departments and agencies such as hospitals, Medical Examiner, Attorney General and police departments may be required. During the review, the Deputy Director or designee will coordinate the assignment of staff responsibilities relating to gathering the necessary information and interacting with other agencies.

7. Agenda items include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Current and past involvement with the Department, including CPS investigations
 - b. Legal status, court orders
 - c. Present living arrangement, other children in the placement, adult providers, other adults living in or who frequent the home or facility
 - d. Medical and behavioral history
 - e. Review of case record, assessment and service plan, case documentation, client contact
 - f. Agency's effort for providing identified services
 - g. Worker's caseload size, supervisory ratio
 - h. Worker's training record
 - i. Case records of other service providers involved with the family
 - j. Applicable policies and procedures
 - k. Drug/alcohol use by child, family members and caretakers
 - l. Runaway attempts and documented efforts at locating child
 - m. Strategies for assisting the remaining children, parent(s), foster family, relatives, significant others and staff
 - n. Review of plans and needs, for remaining children in home or facility to ensure safety, permanency and well-being
 - o. Licensing status of substitute care provider
 - p. Police and coroner reports
 - q. Development of an agency position and draft statement for the press
 8. A final report will be submitted to the Director within thirty (30) working days. The final report will include a summary of the findings and recommendations to improve any identified management and/or systems issues that were cited during the review process. In some situations, all the facts may not be available to the team within this timeframe. In these instances the Director may allow an extension until the necessary information is available. Weekly updates will be provided to the Director in all cases.
 9. The Director will conduct a follow-up review within sixty (60) days of receiving the final report to ensure that the recommendations have been addressed and/or implemented.
 10. Staff must assist and cooperate with the Child Advocate's Office concerning any review or investigation, including providing the Child Advocate's Office with all information known to DCYF.
- C. Release of CPS information pursuant to the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended (P.L. 104-235) (42 USC 5106a).
1. The Department will provide for the disclosure of available facts to the public about a child abuse or neglect case that results in a child's fatality or near fatality.
 2. The Department will release the following available information to the public, providing that nothing disclosed would be likely to compromise the integrity of a criminal investigation or proceeding.
 - a. The fact that a report has been made concerning the alleged victim child
 - b. Whether an investigation has been initiated
 - c. The result of the completed investigation or information about such a case if there are no findings
 - d. Dates and outcomes of child abuse or neglect investigations concerning the alleged victim child
 3. The Department will respond to inquiries from the media regarding child fatalities and near fatalities, but will not initiate contacts with the media unless otherwise determined by the Director.
 4. The Director will determine on a case by case basis who will be the DCYF spokesperson.

5. All information will be distributed consistent with the Department's policies relating to confidentiality and public information and relations.
- D. Staff Support
1. Each individual's response to stress is unique. In some instances the worker may not realize the extreme pressure that he/she is under. The Department recognizes that at times, crises occur overwhelming our ability to cope effectively. The Department understands these pressures and promotes a system to assist each staff member who has been affected by the death or near fatality of a child.
 2. Support services for Departmental employees will be coordinated through the Department's Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team, which is available to provide peer support to colleagues during stressful events.
 3. The CISM Team mission is to provide peer support to colleagues during these stressful events. Team members are nominated by peers and represent the Department's various divisions.
 4. The RI Employee Assistance Program (RIEAP) is also available to assist employees on a self referral basis.
- E. Caregiver Support
1. The Department will make referrals for appropriate services to assist families who have been affected by the death or near fatality of a child.
 2. The Rhode Island Foster Parent Association can assist in providing support to foster parents.